

OBITUARY

RUSSELL FREDERICK BRETHERTON C.B. M.A. F.R.E.S.

Russell was born at Gloucester on 3 February 1906 into a relatively prosperous middle-class family. He was educated at Clifton College and in 1923 became an undergraduate at Wadham College Oxford. Afterwards he became a Fellow of the college, where he remained until called into the Ministry of Supply on the outbreak of war in 1939. He later became an under-secretary to the Treasury.

Whilst at Wadham College he met Miss Jocelyn Nina Mathews who was an undergraduate at Somerville College Oxford and they were married in 1930, living at Cumnor Hill Oxford until 1945, then moving to Ottershaw near Woking, where they remained until 1963, when they finally moved to Birtley Green Bramley. They had four children.

Russell was interested in Lepidoptera from an early age and kept an entomological diary from the age of 15, the first entry recording a male brimstone caught in Leigh Woods, Clifton on 24 July 1921. In this year he also records a large blue at Sheepscombe Bank. His early expeditions were by tram, bus and bicycle, sometimes with the Clifton College Scientific Society, who published some of his records. His diary developed into a very detailed record and in 1923 contains a meticulous sketch map of the Gareloch, where he took his first Scotch argus on 19 August. He continued his interests and records as an undergraduate, his first Oxford record being that of a winter moth at light in the college on 2 December 1923. On a number of occasions he cycled from Oxford to his parents' home in Gloucester and his diary records all the Lepidoptera observed en route.

After he was married, he collected widely in the Oxford area from his house on Cumnor Hill. He did not own a car until 1938 and it had to be laid up during the war, so most of his Oxford collecting had to be done within bicycle range of his house, his favourite spots including Bagley Wood, Hell Coppice, Tubney Woods and Cothill. On his collecting expeditions he was frequently accompanied by his children and often they joined Professor E. B. Ford at Cothill where he was studying the genetics of *Callimorpha dominula* (L.). Russell was consulted by the Professor from the planning stage of the book which was to become number 1 in Collins 'New Naturalist' series, entitled *Butterflies* and his contribution is acknowledged in the preface as follows. "Mr. R. F. Bretherton has read the typescript in detail and I wish to thank him for the large amount of time which he has devoted to it and for his criticism and constructive suggestions. It has been extremely useful to have the benefit of his extensive knowledge both of practical entomology and of the literature of the subject."

One of Russell's wartime collecting expeditions to Cothill is particularly remembered by his eldest son, then a boy of 9 years old, who accompanied him. It was in early September 1940, following the fall of France, and the planes from nearby R.A.F. Abingdon were taking off and landing every few minutes. His bicycle had a carrier on the back to which he secured his beating tray and when they came to leave they were stopped by the village policeman who was convinced that the apparatus was for mounting a machine gun or some instrument of sabotage and that they were German agents. They were subject to a long period of close questioning before being allowed to go home.

One of his earlier writings was the 'Oxford list' of Lepidoptera recorded within 10 miles of Carfax, published by the Ashmolean Natural History Society in 1940. In all, he was the author of over 200 notes and papers on a wide range of entomological

subjects, concentrating in his latter years especially on migration and Continental Lepidoptera. A complete list of all these is being published elsewhere, so it suffices here to mention a very small selection of examples from some of the most notable. He and Michael Chalmers-Hunt annually wrote on the immigration of Lepidoptera into the British Isles, for publication in the 'Entomologists Record'. This journal also published his 'Early history of the swallow-tail butterfly in England' in 1951, the same year as the *Entomologist's Gazette* published his 'Our lost butterflies and moths'. In 1952, jointly with R. E. Ellison and W. B. L. Manley 'Lepidoptera in the Eastern Pyrenees, 1951' was published in the *Entomologist*. In 1955 'A list of the macrolepidoptera and Pyralidae of north-west Surrey' was published in the 'Proceedings and Transactions' of this society and in 1966 'A distribution list of the butterflies of western and southern Europe' was published by the Society for British Entomology.

Although his main work on European butterflies was carried out after the war, he had shown interest in these much earlier and his diary shows that he was doing some collecting in Brittany in 1922 and in Provence in 1924. His extensive collection of European butterflies was built up mainly after 1945 and his expeditions were often in the company of Baron Charles de Worms and J. L. (Bobbie) Messenger.

Russell's association with this society goes back to 1947, when he joined the South London Entomological and Natural History Society as it was then called. He became an ordinary member of Council in 1965 and in 1967 was elected President. From 1969 to 1978 he held the office of Honorary Treasurer and he was again an ordinary member of Council in 1981 and 1982. He was a very keen supporter of the society's field meetings and records show him as the leader of 18 of these. He regularly attended indoor meetings at which he often spoke and exhibited and he always provided interesting exhibits at the society's annual exhibition, his last exhibit being in 1987 when he made up from his collection a case of old specimens of species now believed to be extinct in the British Isles. At these exhibitions he was often recorder for foreign butterfly exhibits and wrote these up for publication. In recognition of his valuable services to the society, he was made an honorary member in 1972.

Although he very much regretted that over his last years his field work became restricted to visits to his garden moth trap, he carried on with other entomological work up to the time of his death and was corresponding on 1990 migrant records until then. He had extensive correspondence with entomologists both in the UK and in other European countries and he will be sadly missed, not only in the Society but in the world of entomology generally. He was a meticulous recorder and published his observations and records without delay, so all the work that he has done will be available for posterity. His extensive collection, together with his diaries and entomological books were bequeathed to the Reading Museum.

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